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Theories of Lyric

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The general theory of lyric is a developing field of study. Approaches to lyric are, however, reputedly stuck in »the impasse of an impressionistic and narrowly formalistic critical debate on the genre« (Müller-Zetzelmann/Rubik 2005, 8). Such claims may be paired with a call for raising the theory of lyric to higher levels (cf. Culler 2015, 2sq.; Zymner 2009, 8sq.; Gibson 2015, 1sq.), including the proposal of formulating, in analogy to the well-established field of narratology, a formal ›lyricology‹ (›lyricologie« or »Lyrikologie«, as it is called in French and German respectively; cf. Zymner 2009, 7–9; Rodriguez 2009; von Ammon 2015). More particularly, it has been suggested that parts of lyric theory should be reconceptualized with the help of narrative theories (cf. Müller-Zetzelmann 2000, Müller-Zetzelmann/Rubik 2005).

However, the influx of concepts from different theories into the analysis of lyric entails some problems. It appears that the practices of analyzing lyric have become heavily influenced by generic models and approaches drawn from the theories of drama and narrative (for critique, cf. Culler 2015, 108–112; Hempfer 2014, 16–21). There are various issues here; for instance, one may ask whether the lyric concepts of voice or persona can be grasped in terms of fictional characters or narrators, or whether lyric typically develops structures that are similar to narrative *discours* and story. More importantly, narratological approaches tend to see lyric as a defective or residual form of the narrative mode (cf. Hempfer 2014, 19–21; Hillebrandt 2015).

Various theoretical issues in the theory of lyric have been taken up with renewed vigor in the last years, including several proposals with respect to the

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definition of the genre (for proposals, cf. Zymner 2009; Hempfer 2014; Prinz/Mandelbaum 2015), its function (cf. Rodriguez 2003; Zymner 2013; Lamarque 2015), and the modelling of the voice (cf. Rabaté 2013) and address (cf. Waters 2003; Culler 2015); other work has questioned the status of lyric altogether (cf. Jackson/Prins 2014).

Recent theoretical proposals do not focus on the catalogue of descriptive terminology (verse, metre etc.), but put particular emphasis on the most basic features and constituents of lyric. This growing scholarly engagement with lyric on a theoretical level raises the issue of defining the macro-genre and its ways of constructing text worlds with respect to the poem's speaker and addressee. In this volume established and upcoming theorists of lyric have been asked to outline their theoretical positions with respect to the following questions: What is the relationship between signs, words and world(s) in lyric or poetry? Does a poem's way of signifying constitute a particular way of creating textual worlds, and how can we describe these worlds? How do authors and readers deal with these worlds? These questions have been addressed by various critics in different traditions of scholarship; however, most studies seem to concentrate on the discourses in their own languages, only occasionally taking note of what has been done in other traditions of literary criticism. This is the main impetus of gathering scholars from different traditions (»national« traditions, for want of a better word) of scholarly engagement with the theory of the lyric. As a consequence, these statements are not entirely new contributions, but present rather an argumentative overview of work that has been done in the past, by outlining possibly divergent opinions about unsolved issues that continue to influence the debate. In the remainder of this introduction, we will address only four issues that are of immediate relevance to this special volume.

What's in a Name? »Lyric« and »Poetry«

The beginning of lyric theory is chiefly associated with Italian Renaissance poetics, in which considerable efforts were made to establish »lyric« as a macro-genre that would contain sub-genres such as ode and elegy. This was achieved, on the one hand, by assuming a continuity among exemplary authors such as Pindar, Horace, and Petrarch (cf. Huss/Mehltretter/Regn 2012) and on the other hand by attempting to apply to this concept of lyric Aristotle's system of levels of mimesis (cf. Genette 1979).

Today the theory of lyric is fragmented along linguistic, national and disciplinary lines. This is apparent even in different traditions of naming and delineating the field. Some Anglo-American scholars have argued that the

»lyricization of poetry« is a relatively recent development that replaced a panoply of different verse genres and forms with a single, ahistorical or timeless notion of lyric (Jackson/Prins 2014, 7; Jackson 2012). »Poetry« formerly encompassed all forms of literature written in verse, but as »poetry« became restricted to short texts, a conceptual overlap with »lyric« resulted. As a consequence, »poetry« may be considered by some researchers as covering too many versified genres (e. g., epic), and, at the same time, as clashing with forms of lyric that show no signs of versification (cf. Zymner 2009, 59–72).

French literary criticism, by contrast, sets into relation two different terms, »lyrisme« (a notion strongly associated with a subjective conception of poetry) and »lyrique« (a constituent of the genre triad most prominently proposed by Batteux) (cf. Rodriguez 2003, 18–28). Genette (1979) outlines the confusions that may and do arise between »lyric« as a genre and as a mode of writing. The situation is again different in German language and literature. »Gedicht« (»poem«) once referred to any text in verse, but with prose having been the dominant mode in drama and narrative since the turn of the 19th century, »Gedicht« is nowadays difficult to distinguish from »Lyrik«. This situation has led to two different kinds of proposals: some critics want to define a restricted category, the »lyric poem« (»lyrisches Gedicht«), as »Einzelrede in Versen«, a »monologue in verse«, or more precisely, a versified utterance without response that is indifferent to a specific situative context (cf. Lamping 2000), whereas others essentially abandon all attempts of differentiating »Lyrik« and »Gedicht« (cf. Burdorf 2015).

Categories and Prototypes

Typological conceptions of lyric predominate, above all, in the German tradition. (Nevertheless it should be noted that Goethe, whose formulation of three »natural forms« of literature was highly influential, had already pointed out that the qualities of epic, lyric and drama are not mutually exclusive [Goethe's *Noten und Abhandlungen zum besseren Verständnis des Westöstlichen Divans*; Staiger 1946]).

However, the imprecision of typological definitions of lyric has led to continual debates about the extent of this macro-genre. Categorical definitions of lyric with sharp boundaries (cf. Lamping 1989) have been welcomed as introducing needed clarity, but have also triggered considerable criticism (cf. Burdorf 2015, 20sq.). A much broader definition by Zymner (2009, 140) points to the fact that positing verse, textuality, and fictionality as defining features introduces difficulties when we turn to modern and avant-garde works (e. g., »concrete poetry«) (for a more recent presentation of his view, cf. his article in this volume). At the same time, we witness a growing preference for prototypical definitions of

lyric that concentrate on so-called ›good examples‹, while leaving the boundaries of the concept vague (e. g., Wolf 2005; Hempfer 2014).

Along with disagreements about what type of concept our modern notion of »lyric« is (is it a classificatory definition with clear boundaries, or a non-classificatory / prototypical definition with fuzzy edges?), there is also a considerable range of opinions about the central features of lyric poetry. Among the questions raised are for example whether lyric is essentially defined by its acoustic or musical quality, its affective quality, its symbolic quality, or something else (cf. Frye 1971, 273–280).

Communicative Participants in Lyric and Poetry

Who speaks the poem (cf. Borkowski/Winko 2011)? Some critics reject this question on the grounds that what we conceive of as lyric today is neither spoken nor sung but fundamentally written, and that we elide this distinction at our peril. Others feel that the problem of attributing the origin of voice in lyric still persists. The answers to »who speaks« depend considerably on one's definition of »lyric«, but fundamental issues of literary criticism are also at stake with respect to the role of authorial intention. We can differentiate roughly among the following positions, which may, however, combine approaches with very different theoretical assumptions.

»Persona/speaker« approaches assume a fundamental and pervasive distinction between the author and the voice in the poem, typically implying a layered model of lyric communication. In contrast, »authorial voice« approaches assume that the speaker in most lyric is identical with the author, while those texts that do develop a clear difference between author and speaker are labelled »role poems« (›Rollenlyrik‹ in German) or »dramatic monologues« (in English). Still others, most prominently Helen Vendler, have suggested a third view, namely that »the lyric is a script written for performance by the reader – who, as soon as he enters the lyric, is no longer a reader but rather an utterer, saying the words of the poem *in propria persona*, internally and with proprietary feeling« (Vendler 1995, xi). We can additionally find »mixed approaches« concerning the poetic speaker which argue that the »I« in a poem should be considered a »blank space« (›Leerstelle«, Fricke/Stocker 2000, 509, Klimek 2016), an empty deictic centre, a position that might be taken up by anybody (Spinner 1975), be it the author, a fictive speaker or the reader (cf. Fricke/Stocker 2000).

All notions of a communicative matrix are, however, incomplete if they lack consideration of address and audience in lyric. Lyric address has received in-depth attention in Anglo-American scholarship (cf. Waters 2003, Culler 2015), but is mostly overlooked in German theory (exceptions include Spoerhase 2013 and Burdorf 2015).

Models of World-making: Fictionality

The fictionality or non-fictionality of poems remains a debated issue, as it touches the important question of the relationship between poetic utterance and extra-textual reality (cf. Zipfel 2011). Culler (2015, 350) emphasizes that lyric is a »statement about this world«; in contrast, Wolf (2005, 23sq.) assumes that fictionality belongs to the basic features of lyric that are »unproblematic« (cf. also Eagleton 2007). These views differ partly in their differing conceptions of lyric, but also in their differing conceptions of fictionality.

Clearly, the question of the fictionality or non-fictionality of poems has far-reaching consequences for how we define, and read, lyric poetry. Zymner (2009, 14–15) sees no obvious reason why a poet should not be able to use words that refer to some circumstances in extra-textual reality or should not refer to himself by the linguistic sign »I« in a poem. Assuming otherwise would not only imply that lyric poetry prescribes a certain kind of reading for each individual poem, but would also entail excluding any sincere statement from the lyric genre. Presumably any activist or religious poet, as well as any lover presenting an original poem to his or her beloved, would affirm that their work is not producing a fictional world but instead refers directly, despite being structured in verse, to his or her real-life situation and commitments (cf. Klimek 2015, 223–225). For Anderegg (2000, 430), however, the lyric, in contrast to the dramatic and the epic, is the only genre in which the distinction between fictionality and non-fictionality is not of central interest; for him, lyric poetry is beyond the realm of everyday linguistic communicational needs and constraints (cf. *ibid.*, 432).

The topic of reference and meaning-making points towards general questions of fictional or factual »text worlds« (cf. Semino 1997; Gavins 2007). It has also been proposed that lyric may mix fictional and non-fictional features. For instance, Käte Hamburger, defining lyric as a »statement about reality« (»Wirklichkeitsaussage«), also concedes the possibility that the event related in a poem may be invented (Hamburger 1968, 187–232).

Lyric world-making is therefore embedded in a larger framework of practices of reading. These complexities of practice have helped to question the assumptions of New Criticism and (Post-)Structuralism about the possible or impossible functions of lyric poetry. The debate is open again for theoretical exploration of the practices and poetics of lyric poetry¹.

¹ This exploration, especially across national and linguistic lines, is also the aim of the International Network for the Study of Lyric (www.lyricology.org), which the authors of this Introduction helped to found.

In this Volume

Charles Altieri proposes, in lieu of a generic definition of the concept ›lyric‹, a focus on »what poets seeking lyricism are doing and why« (Altieri in this volume, 13). Altieri views lyricism (a term he uses independently of the French term ›lyrisme‹) as »a psychological category« that »refers to qualities of experience rather than to objects that are intended to produce various kinds of experience« (ibid., 20). His emphasis falls on poets' imaginative projections about the world and the satisfactions they hope their work will produce for readers. Writing lyric, here, is an activity undertaken by humans for intricate human reasons, and the task is to provide theoretical grounds for valuing this activity. Discussing Ezra Pound's concepts of ›melopoeia‹ and ›phanopoeia‹ in conjunction with works by H.D., Pound, and Lisa Robertson, Altieri also urges attention to the ›disrupting and mixing‹ of generic traditions rather than only to ›common features and common projects‹ (ibid., 13).

In his statement ›The I and the Others: Articulations of Personality and Communication Structures in the Lyric‹, Dieter Burdorf proposes a new model of communication structures in lyric. Considering the heavy criticism the term *lyrisches Ich* (lyrical I) has received in German literary studies, he proposes the category of *Textsubjekt* (textual subject) to shed new light on the intriguing connection between the empirical author and the articulated I within a poem. This textual subject is »situated between the I speaking in the text and the factual producer of this text« (25). Burdorf further offers an overview of the different kinds of addressees of lyric poetry, noting that these too must be taken into account in any model of lyric communication.

Jonathan Culler rejects the idea that lyric is a species of fiction that projects a distinct textual world, and emphasizes that lyric as epideictic discourse provides assertions about our real world: it is »a kind of oratory in verse that offers praise or blame, telling what is to be valued, what to be avoided« (35). This theoretical stance has far-reaching consequences for all constituents of lyric, in particular for the speaker who is not necessarily fictional. Even a fictional lyric speaker would still work very differently from a speaking character in a novel. Culler extends this view to the lyric sequence, which has been understood as a series of related poems in which a rudimentary plot may be discerned, and insists on the general priority of the ritualistic dimension.

Susan Gillingham's notion of ›lyric‹ focusses on its performance to musical accompaniment in the Hebrew Bible. She explores the cultural history of the ancient string instruments ›lyra‹ and ›psalterion‹, from which our modern terms ›lyric‹ and ›Psalter‹ derive (cf. 41sq.). Pointing out that the Psalms comprised many kinds of lyrical poetry, most if not all sung to the accompaniment of a

stringed instrument, she compares Hebrew poetic conventions to poetry in Ancient Greece, and offers a brief overview of the performance of psalmody in Christian liturgy up to the modern age. She concludes that Hebrew Psalterion, its Greek and Latin translations as well as newer vernacular adaptations, have always been most »lyrical« in this root sense of the word.

Klaus W. Hempfer sketches a theory of lyric based on speech act theory, prototype theory and a specific theory of fiction. For Hempfer, lyric should be seen as a transhistorical invariant prototypical structure, defined by the presence of the fiction of performativity. According to Hempfer, lyric speech is based on the (staged) simultaneity or coincidence of speech situation and represented situation: »What the speaker articulates linguistically is enacted at the very moment of linguistic performance« (57).

Peter Lamarque offers a brief critical survey of a variety of questions surrounding the lyric in analytical philosophy and especially in analytical aesthetics. These include the proper definition of the genre, the problem of poetic expression, the »heresy of paraphrase«, the idea of form-content-unity, the matter of poetic experience, and the qualities of truth and profundity. Lamarque proposes to conceive the emerging field of the analytic philosophy of poetry as »the exploration of a practice, not the search for a definition« (65). Over the course of his article, Lamarque identifies some of the rules that guide this practice, such as the rule of unparaphrasability or of form-content-unity, and explores from an analytic point of view further issues in the theory of lyric such as subjectivity, expressiveness, and poetic experience. Lamarque concludes that the philosophy of poetry lends itself to exploring »ways in which thinking about language can be extended and enriched in this unusual context, well beyond the familiar paradigm of sentences imparting information and corresponding with facts« (71).

Fabian Lampart identifies changes in recent discussions of lyric theory, pointing out that the boundaries between literary practice and academic lyric theory have become more permeable during the last decades. Whereas postwar German-language poetics in the wake of Gottfried Benn favored the poem as a printed text, poets and scholars nowadays have increasingly shifted their attention to performative dimensions. Lyric theory has yet to succeed in modeling exactly how formal aspects of a poem such as rhyme, sound, rhythm and metre can activate »historically and textually stored knowledge in performative practices« (80). But Lampart also identifies certain discrepancies with respect to these questions between the state of the art in lyric theory and the practice of teaching lyric analysis.

Beginning from a definition of lyric poetry as a versified utterance without response (»Einzelrede«) that is indifferent to a specific situative context, Dieter Lamping advocates a theory of lyric that would have two main foci: first, as artefacts that show a high degree of intertextuality, lyric poetry in Lamping's view

should be regarded as a certain kind of world literature. This intertextual aspect with special attention to concepts of world literature demands more thorough investigation, Lamping concludes. At the same time he urges the pursuit of a philosophical approach that would elaborate the status of lyric poetry within the philosophy of mind.

Dominique Rabaté proposes an account of the dynamic productive force of poems in terms of »lyrical gestures«, to which the notion of the lyrical subject (»sujet lyrique«) as both the product and producer of the poem is central. In this view, the process of reading and reciting the poem becomes tantamount to stripping the poem off its referential constraints, transforming the poem into a gesture that indicates directions in which discursive contextualization and the lyrical subject may be reproduced again and again.

Jahan Ramazani starts by enumerating different features that have been regarded as being integral parts of lyric (e. g., the address to a »you«, the expression of feelings and thoughts of an »I«, brevity, self-reflexivity) and shows that none of them is sufficient to clearly determine lyric. For Ramazani, »lyric is a changing set of conventions or schemas sometimes unconsciously brought to works by writers and audiences« (99). Ramazani then offers some »possible refinement[s]« of Culler's (2015) theory by elaborating not only the ways in which lyric is comparable to other genres and speech-acts, as Culler did, but also those in which lyric can differ from them. Ramazani's view results in a Bakhtinian »dialogic poetics« in which »lyric is intergeneric« and »transnational« (102), being not only constantly in dialogue with other texts but also with »other discursive worlds«. Finally, he names several challenges of a transnational lyric theory that will have to accommodate the »cross-cultural hybridizations« (104) of genres as well as to answer critiques of its Western focus.

Antonio Rodriguez notes that lyric theory has been for too long restricted to text or author, whereas the role of the reader is frequently neglected or is limited to the passive activity of lending his voice to the poet's lyric. After describing the theoretical difficulties of three approaches that focus on author or text, Rodriguez suggests that lyricology should consider lyric in terms of lyric reading, which is established by following the text's intentionality. The lyric intentionality is then described as an affective experience of reality that is embodied by the text. Lyric intentionality is differentiated from other forms of intentionality such as narrative (a reading that is dominated by the principle of following a plot), and different forms of intentionality can exist within a poem next to lyric intentionality.

In his contribution, Haun Saussy suggests that the primacy of the signifier is not a modern or postmodern aberration, but the immemorial formula for the circulation of poems and songs from which the »lyric I« emerges. Saussy wonders

whether we do express ourselves through our signifying forms or (as these examples would tend to suggest) whether we discover ourselves through them. Saussy concludes that lyric subjectivity, »once we have rearranged things in this way, becomes the anomaly in need of explanation« (123).

A perspective from Slavic Studies is offered by Henrieke Stahl. In Russia and Ukraine, poetry has remained an important means of communicating beliefs and opinions, even or especially in the age of the Internet. Stahl suggests developing lyric theory by introducing new analytical methods instead of continuously providing new definitions of the genre. Stahl's statement proposes an analysis of the heterogeneous forms of the subject in lyric texts: following the existential philosophy of Heinrich Barth, she suggests distinguishing among four levels of lyric subjects: (1) the empirical subject; (2) its manifestation in particular forms of expression; (3) the »transcendental subject« as the thought-premise for the perception of an integral subject; (4) the subject of expression (cf. 130).

Eva Zetzelmann critiques a tendency in narratology to posit lyric as narrative's »other«, defining it negatively as anti-narrative or as deficiently narrative. Instead Zetzelmann focuses on the elements that lyric and its alleged opposite narrative may share. More specifically, Zetzelmann demonstrates how »ludic artifice and illusive world-building« (146), concepts originating from narratology, both do and do not characterize lyric; how poems are more likely to construct multiple, layered possible worlds than narratives. She forcefully challenges the usefulness of a generic typology based on whether the speaker of a poem is fictional (dramatic monologue/role poem) or represents the author. Instead, Zetzelmann draws on cognitive narratology (frames, scripts, and Turner and Fauconnier's conceptual blending) to describe the elements of the lyric »speaker-character«.

Rüdiger Zymner understands lyric as the culturally varying results of a trans-cultural human behavior. His aim is to overcome the restrictions of modern Western poetics and open the view to a global, transhistorical, comparatist understanding of lyric. Zymner's metatheoretical reconstruction of a non-Aristotelian concept of »lyric« (cf. Zymner 2009), inspired by prototype theory and centered on the display of »lingual mediality« (151), leads him to an understanding of lyric text worlds as »cognitive constructions« made by writers, speakers, readers or hearers (152). After summarizing how such cognitive constructions are usually built, he stresses the fact that lyric typically give only poor and incomplete information about how to construct the text world. He adds that this information is partly embedded in the lyric's »facture« or workmanship, while some lyric texts offer no opportunity to build a text world. Zymner concludes that the typical »semiotic unity« of »both conceptual and factual information« (158) given by a lyric can lead the interpreter to build up two or more text worlds.

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